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TAGS: [PREL](#) [AG](#) [WI](#)  
SUBJECT: ALGERIAN MFA COUNSELOR URGES U.S. WALK FINE LINE  
ON SAHARA TALKS

REF: A. STATE 88684  
[1](#)B. ALGIERS 910

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROBERT FORD, REASON 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Algerian MFA Counselor Baali cautioned that outside pressure on the Polisario to accept even a modified Moroccan autonomy plan would likely lead the Polisario to quit the nascent negotiation process started in New York. Baali, who was part of the Algerian delegation in New York, opined that the Polisario would be willing to make some concessions but it would not do so under perceived pressure to accept the Moroccan plan. Recalling U.S. statements labeling the Moroccan autonomy plan credible and serious, he urged that the U.S. now stand back and let the two parties negotiate directly without outside pressure. Ambassador told Baali that we welcomed the start of talks and are urging both the Moroccans and the Polisario to be realistic and flexible. Ambassador also cautioned that the Polisario would lose much international sympathy if it walks out of the talks.

[1](#)2. (C) Baali readily conceded that the ultimate solution to the Western Sahara conflict was something "less than independence" for the Sahrawis. He said it would take much creativity to find a workable formula. He said he was puzzled that UN SRSG Van Walsum seemed inclined to tackle the hardest questions, such as sovereignty, up front; the inclusion of the sovereignty issue in the first draft of the June 30 report was a mistake, in his view. Baali asserted that it would be better to start with relatively easier issues first, such as the powers of a parliament or the executive in a Sahrawi autonomous region. Ambassador noted that we are urging the Moroccans to be ready to engage on precisely these kinds of issues. Baali shot back that the discussion cannot be based just on the Moroccan plan. Rather, the two sides need to be led to the discussion by the UN and the Friends of the Sahara. The hardest issue, sovereignty, ought to be left out of the negotiations until the very end when the Polisario could see a full offer on the table and decide then whether or not to make the toughest compromise.

[1](#)3. (C) Baali recalled a formula discussed in the 1980s that the Polisario might have accepted involving a Sahrawi legislature and executive that operated in a Sahrawi region itself bound personally to the Moroccan King. The Moroccan flag would have flown over the region. However, the Sahrawi region was to have been allowed to attend international meetings as the Sahrawi region. Thus, said Baali, the question of sovereignty was shaved very

narrowly. He speculated that it would take similar creativity to bridge the gap now.

¶4. (C) Baali opined that Van Walsum would likely benefit from the experience of MINURSO chief Harston, whose diplomatic career gave him better insights into the negotiating dynamic. Baali stated that the differences between the UN's Political Affairs and Peacekeeping Departments should not impede Van Walsum getting the best advice and help possible.

¶5. (C) Comment: Baali expects to be part of the Algerian delegation in New York August 10. He absolutely was not shopping the idea in para 3 above but rather musing about how difficult it will be to craft a solution mutually acceptable to both sides. His comment about an active, but careful, UN role that includes Harston reminds of what Algerian MFA number two Lamamra told us last week (ref). His remark about the ultimate solution being less than independence was also striking, but Baali gave no sign that Algeria would exert open pressure on the Polisario, or support others' open pressure.

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